RFMS MAD DOG
Final Report
to
SFA Management Council

May 19, 2000

The Story

A Dog's Life

Grrrrrr.

Although most schools have successfully implemented the new Recipient Financial Management System (RFMS) in support of the Federal Pell Grant Program for the 1999-2000 award year, we began hearing grumblings from schools about the new system. Things like: the workload had doubled, information about the new system came out too late, it was too hard to use, and, too often, the help line was not enough help.

Mad what?

The Mad Dog was formed as a cross-functional team to talk to schools, their servicers, and software providers about problems arising from implementation of RFMS in order to recommend longer term changes the Department could make to streamline the Pell Grant process.

Don't Fence Me In.

The Mad Dog team used a variety of ways to reach out to the Department and its customers to find out what they were thinking about the new Pell/RFMS process:
- 16 site visits – including one servicer
- 2 focus groups – with a total of 40 participants
- 6 teleconferences – including one to a third party vendor
- Call monitoring – Customer Service calls for EDExpress and Pell
- E-mail – Analyzed messages from SFATECH and the #Pell address

The Team involved customers in both the FAA's office and the Business office thereby capturing the entire process of processing Pell Grants. This holistic approach generated high quality, detailed feedback facilitating issue recognition and formulation of effective action steps.

You Can Teach an Old Dog New Tricks.

Although schools had encountered difficulties in the RFMS implementation, the Mad Dog team did receive positive comments. However, this document details three areas where the Mad Dog has identified a need to focus: Top Notch Service, Simpler Use, and Better Information. There are eight objectives that the Mad Dog team has identified as a means for addressing issues in Pell Grant processing. Attached to each objective are a number of action items. These action items fall into two categories; *Quick Hits* – which have a time frame of 90 days or less, and *Recommendations* – which are actions to be taken that require longer term planning. The Mad Dog team sees these objectives and actions as leading to greater understanding of the environment in which schools function and greater integration between the Department and schools in achieving an easy and efficient processing of Title IV fund delivery. The results of the Mad Dog are also intended to inform the work being carried out by the Common Origination and Disbursement IPT, as well as, the work of other IPT's. The Team hopes that by implementing these action items we can make OSFA's bite much more effective than its bark.

1 *Top-Notch Service*

Actions	Lead	Other Participants	Planned Benefit Date
Create "one-call" RFMS question and issue resolution ♦ provide RFMS CS staff dedicated on-call expert resources ♦ improve CS scripting ♦ develop hand-off protocol for NSLDS, NCS, 3rd party vendors, school personnel. *Note: As the Call Center IPT matures, this process will move to the Call Center IPT)*	Pell Systems RFMS CS Workgroup	Students CIO ACS NCS	May 2001
Educate CSRs on basics of the multiple systems needed to support Pell by developing training that includes basic RFMS, NSLDS, EDExpress, CPS operations	Pell Systems RFMS CS Workgroup	SFA University Students Schools ACS NCS	December 2000
Create continuous customer satisfaction feedback system for Pell delivery by giving schools frequent and painless opportunities to provide feedback: ♦ After each contact send an email survey to school via Pell ID, ♦ On an ad hoc, random selection basis, ♦ In person through school visits, ♦ In person at conferences and meetings. Evaluate call trends and issue FAQ's and systems enhancements as needed	Pell Systems RFMS CS Workgroup	Pell Operations CIO Analysis ACS	Starting immediately
Coordinate Pell communication across systems (i.e. RFMS,CPS,NSLDS, EDExpress.) Move responsibility for initial responses to Pell RFMS questions on SFATech to Pell Systems, Pell Ops and Pell Customer Service. Maximize use of current phone system features including: ♦ Reinstating IVRU call answering and routing, ♦ Customizing IVRU to allow schools to request reports or access data, ♦ Call monitoring ♦ Collecting customer satisfaction data at the end of each call via the IVRU	Pell Systems RFMS CS Workgroup Pell Ops Pell Systems Pell Systems	 ACS CSB ACS Pell Operations	Starting immediately February 2001 Summer 2000
Define customer service standards, indicators and implement in the Pell Customer Service contract. Provide no-cost customer service to all schools (eliminate toll call to EDExpress)	Pell Systems Students	Acquisitions CPO Pell Operations	November 2000 TBD

2 *Simpler Use*

Objective 2: Facilitate schools' and other partners' preparedness for SFA modernization initiatives

"Electronic initiatives have strained our institutional resources—the university is not upgrading fast enough to keep pace"

Actions	Lead	Other Participants	Planned Benefit Date
Initiate outreach to IT staff at schools, servicers, 3rd party software vendors, to collect information about computing environments, IT capabilities and issues.	CIO Schools	Students contractors	IPT
Provide minimum software and hardware requirements for interfacing with our systems to schools.	CIO	Schools Students contractors	Pending Federal Register Notice
Increase awareness of school business processes and constraints imposed on schools by outside entities and authorities.	Schools		Begin immediately

Objective 3: Eliminate rounding and Address pennies issues

"We want consistent rounding rules that all schools use"

Actions	Lead	Other Participants	Planned Benefit Date
Develop a single policy on rounding for all Title IV programs, systems. ♦ Develop tools to assist all schools in using the same rounding standards.	Schools	CFO Students Financial Partners Analysis Contractors	IPT
Evaluate the financial impact of not reporting pennies in the Title IV Programs.	Schools	CFO Students Financial Partners Analysis Contractors	IPT

Objective 4: Make it easier for schools to submit records and correct errors

"Having to send origination and multiple disbursement records has doubled our workload"

Actions	Lead	Other Participants	Planned Benefit Date
Review impact of a single record submitted at the time of disbursement to the current RFMS system. ♦ Review origination and disbursement record data elements and how we use them. Eliminate data elements not used. ♦ Review edits to ensure they provide value to the transaction. *Note: These items will set the stage for an early implementation of COD.*	Schools TIV Delivery		COD IPT
Provide alternate, optional RFMS record formats, prior to COD implementation, based on COD analysis of data elements.	Pell Systems	COD IPT ACS	May 2001
Reevaluate edits and warning vs. error conditions. Use data on "hits" on edit codes to determine: ♦ Edits never hit, ♦ Most frequent edits hit, ♦ Ranges of edits hit. Eliminate edits never hit. Analyze reasons for the most frequent edits; modify the system, develop documentation to help schools reduce errors.	Pell Systems	COD IPT ACS	In progress.
Develop more descriptive explanation of edits and error conditions, how to correct and prevent errors.	Pell Systems	Pell Operations ACS	May 2000.
Create a database definition (DBD) value within RFMS for QAP schools to use for student verification status.	Pell Systems	ACS Schools QAP	May 2001
Evaluate the current verification edit process to ensure that subsequent selections do not occur after a school locks-in the record.	Student	CPS	April 2002
Develop a "to-be" vision of what a common student identifier needs to be.	SFA	SFA	June 2001

Objective 5: Make reconciling simple

"Help! My business office is ready to shoot me"

Actions	Lead	Other Participants	Planned Benefit Date
Create a 1999-2000 YTD file for all non-EDExpress schools that provides the functionality of the EDExpress YTD file: ♦ Printable, ♦ Sortable by user-defined parameters, ♦ Delimited for input into user developed compare program.	Pell Systems	Pell Operations ACS	June/July 2000
Include business offices and NACUBO in outreach efforts as they support the Title IV delivery process.	Pell Operations	GAPS	August 2000

2 *Simpler Use (con't)*

Objective 6: Ensure consistent and timely delivery of Pell funds to schools

Action	Lead	Other Participants	Planned Benefit Date
Re-evaluate initial authorization formula to ensure schools have adequate initial funding but are not over-enriched.	Pell Operations	CFO Pell Systems ACS	In progress May 2000
Eliminate maximum number of manual steps in the RFMS Oracle subledger approve and pay process.	Pell Operations	CFO Pell Systems' ACS	In progress August 2000
Evaluate Oracle general ledger COTS product capabilities and compare to subledger capabilities. Transition from subledger to general ledger if warranted.	Pell Operations	CFO Pell Systems ACS	In progress August 2000
Analyze 1999-2000 production interruptions that delayed RFMS funding request processing within RFMS and between RFMS and GAPS. Modify code, procedures as indicated.	Pell Systems	Pell Operations ACS CFO GAPS	In progress
Develop metrics containing indicators of how well the system is enabling the timely delivery of Pell Grant funds to schools.	Pell Systems	ACS	May 2001

3 *Better Information*

Objective 7: Enable 3rd party software providers and mainframe schools to deliver Pell

"We live or die by the timeliness of our software updates"

Actions	Lead	Other Participants	Planned Benefit Date
Include 3rd party software vendors and mainframe schools in: ♦ Integrated requirements definition meetings ♦ Periodic walkthroughs of changing requirements ♦ Standing focus groups ♦ Expand systems testing opportunities for 3rd party vendors	Pell Systems	Pell Operations ACS CIO	May 2001
Commit to synchronizing the annual development requirements to the school business process needs so 3rd party vendors and mainframe schools have sufficient systems development and testing periods.	SFA	SFA	July 2000

Objective 8: Provide schools with easy access to comprehensive RFMS information through full-service and self-service methods

"I shouldn't have to be a computer expert to understand the error codes"

Actions	Lead	Other Participants	Planned Benefit Date
Provide schools current, integrated information through a single entry point.	CIO	Schools	In progress Schools Portal
Redefine "implement a new RFMS release" beyond software implementation. Ensure user documentation, training, and customer service readiness are part of implementation.	Pell Systems	Pell Operations CMO IIS ACS	May 2001
Expand number of schools participating in development cycle focus groups. Conduct concurrent focus groups in a variety of locations to maximize school input.	Pell Systems	CMOs IIS Pell Operations ACS	May 2001
Create a "functional" guide to RFMS in layman's terms for release to SFA staff, schools, 3rd party software vendors, servicers.	Pell Systems	Pell Operations ACS Analysis	May 2001
Increase Pell and RFMS knowledge within SFA by expanding SFA participation in development cycle focus groups to include regional staff and non-Pell headquarters staff.	Pell Systems	CMOs IIS Pell Operations ACS	May 2001
Re-evaluate, with schools, the technical reference and other documents to improve content. Include best practices and business rules in documentation for schools.	Pell Systems	Pell Operations ACS	May 2001
Make all RFMS documentation available and downloadable through the RFMS web site.	Pell Systems	ACS	May 2001.
Expand the help functionality on the RFMS web site.	Pell Systems	ACS Pell Operations CMO	In progress for July 2000. Further improvements May 2001

RFMS Mad Dog
Team Members

Paula Bakey - NCS
Milissa Bartold - Mod. Partner
Kirsten Dartnell - Mod. Partner
Paul Hill Jr. - CIO
Candice Hong - CFO
Jim McMahon - Schools
Sean McMahon - CFO
Caroline Raistrick - ACS
Karen Sefton - Schools (Team Lead)
Michele Selvage - Schools
Brian Sentz - ACS
Kathleen Wicks - Schools

With Special Thanks to:

Nichelle Boone - Schools
Susan Burwell - NCS
Doug Farbrother - PSG
Mary Haldane - Schools
Anthony Jones - Analysis
Ginger Klock - Students
Tanya Boyd - Students